



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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For More Information, Contact:
Alicia Lepp
Division of Disease Control
North Dakota Department of Health
Phone: 701.328.2378
E-mail: alepp@nd.gov

West Nile Virus Surveillance Activities Begin in North Dakota

BISMARCK, N.D. – On June 1, 2014, the North Dakota Department of Health – in conjunction with several local, state, federal and private agencies – began the coordination of West Nile virus surveillance activities. Surveillance activities include reporting and testing sick horses and other domestic animals, trapping and testing mosquitoes, monitoring illness in humans, and reporting and testing dead birds.

West Nile virus is transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito. In North Dakota, the greatest risk for West Nile virus transmission occurs during the months of July and August when the *Culex tarsalis* mosquito, the mosquito that transmits the disease, is more abundant.

“Most people infected with West Nile virus experience no symptoms or have only mild symptoms such as fever and headache,” according to Alicia Lepp, epidemiologist with the North Dakota Department of Health. “The more serious form of the illness, West Nile neuroinvasive disease, can have symptoms of high fever, severe headache, stiff neck, altered mental status and death. People over 50 and those who have other health issues are at a greater risk for developing the more serious form.”

In 2013, 127 West Nile virus cases in humans were reported to the Department of Health, with two deaths. Additionally, West Nile infection was identified in nine birds, two cows, one dog and one horse. There is no way to predict the severity of this year’s West Nile virus season. The intensity of West Nile virus activity fluctuates in North Dakota from year to year and depends on a variety of factors including the weather, the number of birds and mosquitoes that maintain and spread the virus, and human behavior. It is important to note that since surveillance began in 2002, a human case has been reported in every county in the state.

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600 E. Boulevard Ave. Dept. 301, Bismarck, North Dakota 58505-0200
Phone: 701.328.2372 Fax: 701.328.4727 E-mail: health@nd.gov

Visit the health department home page at www.ndhealth.gov.

“There are no medications to treat or vaccines to prevent West Nile virus infection,” Lepp said. “Therefore, it is important that people prevent West Nile virus disease by taking precautions now and throughout the summer months to protect themselves against mosquito bites.”

People are encouraged to take the following protective measures to avoid mosquito bites:

- Use insect repellents containing ingredients registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – such as DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus (or PMD) or permethrin – and apply according to manufacturer’s instructions.
- Wear protective clothing, such as long-sleeved shirts and pants.
- Limit outdoor activities between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most likely to bite.
- Eliminate stagnant water in containers around homes where mosquitoes can lay their eggs (such as buckets, flowerpots, old tires, wading pools and birdbaths).
- Keep the grass around your home trimmed.

For more information about West Nile virus, contact Alicia Lepp, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378 or visit www.ndhealth.gov/wnv.

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